



# HOW TO RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE IN CHRISTCHURCH

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CANTERBURY MUSEUM  
New Zealand Natural & Human Heritage



## Introduction

This pamphlet gives a brief outline of where to look for information, and what can be found.

The history of a house is not just about the building itself. People bought the land, built the house, and lived in it, influencing its shape and structure by their activities. Usually there are no pre-existing written histories, so active investigation using a variety of resources is needed.

Although this information is specifically for Christchurch houses, the principles can be applied to other areas.



A E Preece photograph  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 1987.284.1



Lovell Smith collection  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 1950.80.12

To get the most out of other sources of information it is advisable to first search the title of a property back to the original purchaser of the land. This will give you the names of the people who owned the property. Knowing these names is a good starting point for finding out more of the history of the house.

Cover image (top) Huntsbury cobb cottage  
Credit: W A Taylor collection  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 1968.213.71

Cover image (bottom) Unidentified bungalow  
Credit: Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 19XX.2.568

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## Land

The following resources provide information about the land and changes to it, as structures were built on it, demolished or altered over time.

CERTIFICATES OF TITLE are a record of who owned the land and on what date they purchased it. Also on the title are references to legal documents associated with ownership such as mortgages, wills and transfers. These can provide interesting supplementary information. Titles can be searched from the present owner back to the first person to purchase that piece of land, or vice versa. Prior to the issue of titles, land ownership was managed through the deeds system. The Deeds registers can be seen at Land Information New Zealand. Sometimes a mortgage on the title can suggest when a building was built.

Certificates of title, land deeds and the associated documents mentioned on the certificate of title can be researched at Land Information New Zealand. They have a very helpful pamphlet, *Searching a title*, and a very informative website at [www.linz.govt.nz](http://www.linz.govt.nz). Some of the older discharged mortgages and wills are held at Archives New Zealand, Christchurch. There is a full index to these. Also held there, are copies of Crown Grants which were the documents used by the New Zealand Government to grant ownership of land. They are indexed up to about 1880 and record the first person to purchase that piece of land from the Government.

### RATING AND VALUATION

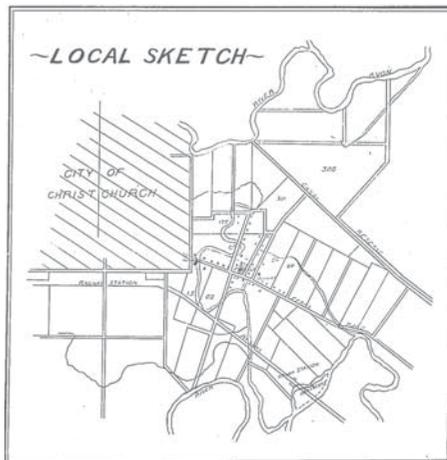
ROLLS are records of who was living on the property, the value of the land and existing buildings. Local Body rating and valuation rolls for Christchurch are held at

Archives New Zealand Christchurch Office. They also hold government valuation records from about 1910. When the Valuation Department was abolished in the 1990s, other agencies (including private firms) took over this valuation function. Some of these private agencies hold data on houses which sometimes includes a sketch of the house layout and estimate of the age. See the Telecom Yellow Pages for details.

MAPS can sometimes show the outline of buildings. Sale plans, which give details of the properties sold and sometimes have sketches or photographs on them, have occasionally survived. The largest collection of maps and sale plans is at Canterbury Museum. Maps and survey plans can be seen at Land Information New Zealand.



Bungalows, suburban Christchurch  
Stan McKay photograph  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 1980.192.23



Detail from sale plan of Ferry Road building sites  
J T Smith & Co, 1878  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref:CMU661

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## Houses

Establishing the date that a house was built is often a combination of research, deduction and educated guessing.

Examining the building carefully can give valuable clues to its history and date of erection. Check behind mantelpieces, cupboards, newspaper linings on floors and walls for clues to the dates of additions or alterations, either in the form of newspapers, documents, or actual writing on the walls, frames or architraves.

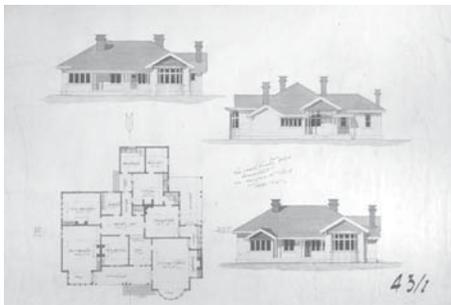
Dating the house by its architectural style can be difficult. Two useful reference books are *The age of houses illustrated*, by M B Cooke, and *Old New Zealand houses 1800-1940*, by Jeremy Salmond.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust has information files on

registered buildings and houses. These can be seen at the Southern regional office or check their website [www.historic.org.nz](http://www.historic.org.nz)

The Christchurch City Council Urban Design and Heritage Unit has approximately 600 files – one for each building listed in the City Plan. Also included in the files are photographs, newspaper cuttings, copies of certificates of titles and information about architects and Council reports. The names of buildings which are listed can be found in volume 3 of the City Plan. This can be seen at Christchurch City Libraries.

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS AND ARCHITECTS. Sadly not many domestic housing plans have survived. Canterbury Museum has a collection available to the public; the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury also has a collection,



134 Hereford Street, Christchurch  
Roy Lovell Smith architectural plan  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 1980.78.2

and Archives NZ, Christchurch holds plans mainly of state houses. The Christchurch City Council Urban Design and Heritage Unit has a collection of historical architectural plans which are indexed. It is possible to search these by address, architect or name of building.

Unless a plan has survived, the chances of finding out who the architect was, are slim. Similarly, copies of building specifications are rare. The University of Canterbury Art History Department has compiled extensive files on architects and there are theses and books on

architects and architecture available at Christchurch City Libraries.

**PHOTOGRAPHS.** Photographs can show a wealth of detail. Canterbury Museum has a large collection of photographs arranged by areas, and for the central city, by streets. The Aotearoa New Zealand Centre has a growing number of photographs. Local illustrated newspapers such as the *Canterbury Times* and *Weekly Press* may prove helpful, and there is an index to illustrations at Canterbury Museum and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre. Aerial photographs can show the changes to the outline of houses and the subdivision of properties.

**DRAINAGE PLANS.** The Environmental Services Unit of the Christchurch City Council has records of the drainpipes laid to a house, which can usually give the date the house was first connected to the sewer.

From information on the block plans, it is possible to check the Drainage Inspector's pick-ups which often have an outline sketch of the building, and are helpful for finding out when alterations involving drainage were made to the building. The Environmental Services Unit charges a search fee for this service.

#### BUILDING PERMITS.

Unfortunately most house plans relating to permits issued prior to about 1960 have been destroyed. At the Environmental Services Unit, the surviving records can give an idea of recent alterations and additions. Time-consuming, but worthwhile checking if you can estimate the date of construction, are the building permit registers, held at Archives New Zealand, covering 1907-1964. These record the architect, the builder, and who the house was built for. While state houses did not require building permits, Archives New

Zealand holds information about state housing subdivisions and these documents can give an indication of the standard layout proposed for the house.

NEWSPAPERS. Check around the time of sale, there may be an advertisement which will give information. There may also be tender notices published in the paper prior to its construction.



Newspaper advertisement from The Star, Christchurch 9 August 1902  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: Pg 8

Newspapers and newspaper indexes are held in the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre including an index to houses featured in *The Press* newspaper for the last 15 years.

BOOKS. Many books have been published giving designs for houses or looking at New Zealand's architectural heritage. Local histories can give the background of an area, when it was subdivided, and the changes

over the years of settlement. A search through the Christchurch City Libraries' catalogue on their website:

[library.christchurch.org.nz](http://library.christchurch.org.nz) will suggest titles and authors. Their publication, *Local history resources*, is especially useful for finding out about the history of suburbs. It is also available on their website.

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## Finding out about people

Researching the people who owned or lived in the house can not only provide information about the property, but give flesh to the bones. Indexes of useful biographical information are at the Canterbury Museum, and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre. See the Christchurch City Library website for detailed instructions on how to find out about people. For information about people in

the nineteenth century, of particular note is the unpublished *G R Macdonald dictionary of Canterbury biographies* held at the Canterbury Museum.

STREET DIRECTORIES. Street directories are handy for finding out when people took up residence, but be wary as names are often wrong, and the entry in the directory can be a couple of

Lavery Robt. Jun, miller	55 Searle Wm, butcher's ass	20 Henderson Wm Murray,
De Vries Gerard, engr. Otago	57 Cook Wm, carrier	carpenter
Worick (p. r)	59 Stewart Hy. Alex, carpent	28 McCreavy Mrs Amy
Stewart Wm, auctioneer	& joiner	34 Peachley Mrs Agnes, contr
Fairbairn Andw (F, Wright & Co)	63 Chalmer's Jno, motorman	36 Stalling Jno, tanner
Samuda Chas & G, salesman	65 Schumacher Andw, hair	40 Virtue Jas Thos, fruiter
Colwell Wm Arscott, salesman	..... Nursery rd.	42 Young Wm, Henderson,
Nelson Jan, draper's ass	71 Jenkins Edgar Hy, organ	butcher; & p. r
Seymour Stanley Briscoe (S & Son)	builder	43 Trough Alex, fruiter (p. r)
Seymour Claude (S & Son)	75 Turner Jas, printer	46 Dunsmuir Geo, mangle
..... Northern railway intersects.	77 Harris Wm Fredk, gardner	chomist
Hampshire Geo H (Pletcher, Humphreys & Co)	..... Church st.	50 Dunsmuir Geo Harly,
Brown Chas Henry, cont AMP	Linwood Congregational Chh	chomist (p. r)
Smith Chas, gardener	79 Ferguson Esq, pastor	56 Smart Mrs Ellen
Crowshaw Jno, traveller	Purvis Chas Lee, storeman	60 March Jas K, jr, superin-
Deurien Miss Madeline	81 Collins Charles, cutter	tendant village settlements
Worsley Mrs Fanny	85 Otago Geo, overrid foreman	March Geo Edwin, bank off
Kindergarten School	88 Sooter Mrs Mary Ann	79 Barrett How (Jas & AId),
Inwood Miss Mary	..... here is Matheson rd.	cont merchants
Cuddons Is intersects.....	Fuller Jas, bootmaker	Barrett Jas (B Bros)
Russell Thos G, solicitor	Mason Thos, cutter	..... here is Osborne st.....
McCombs Jas, draper's ass	Oliver Mrs Christina	84 Meecher Jas, bootmaker
85 Ramotha Church, Eng	City Council Stone Yard	86 Allen Geo Alex, motorcycle
Murray-Aynley Mrs Blanche	97 Stout Wm, carpenter	paper
Gerard Miss Kate & Rose	George B, patent med vendor	100 Bennock Fredk Peter,
Parke Raymond, farmer	..... Oliviers rd.	tobacconist
..... here is Clyde rd.	Georger Francis, farmer	102 Pam Arth, clerk N Z R
Upper Riccarton	Hobson Wm, hairdresser (p. r)	108 Hunt Alex, tailor
..... Ferry road, Linwood	Boards Alex, musician	110 Holloway Geo, engr
Left side from Fitzgerald av	Anthony Jas, french polisher	112 Hutchings Chas, hairdruar
3 Hangerby Chas, plasterer	Roberts Jas, coal, and met	114 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
5 Topping Jas, labourer	..... here is Cambridge st	..... here is Esau's rd & Washburn
7 Bull Fresh Herb, salesman	Davies Jas, bootmaker; & p. r	..... Ferry road, Sydenham
11 Anderson Mrs Jessie	Walters Thos Jno, range mstr	(Continuation of Low High st)
Anderson James, carpenter	129 Ives Chas, salesman	Right side from Fitzgerald av
13 Jordan Leonard, carpenter	Hirst Mrs Jas, store	Narrowly House for Aged
15 Vallone Mrs Ann	Grant & MacDonald, Chh	Poor & Orphan Children
15 Hissott Jno, hairdresser	..... Nursery Co.	Inspector superior, De Pazzi
19 Berrill Mrs Eliza	Grant Wm Lake (Grant & MacDonald)	Brown Thos, merchant
Brough Wm, iron and saddle	..... right of way.	STATHMORE PRI-
21 Lawrence Esq, carpenter	Edmonds Thos Wm, baking	VICATE HOSPITAL (Mra
23 Fitzgerald Wm, ironway	powder mstr; (p. r)	T Cochran Brown, pro-
employee	Cookburn Thos Fredk, carrier	practises)
25 Tattersall Henry, tailor	..... here are Junction of & Washburn	33 Begg Alex (Begg & Son)
27 DeWolf Geo, labourer	..... here are Junction & Wilson	Begg Jas Alex (B & Son)
29 Wain Mrs Mary	roads	Murray Jas, boot importer
31 Mills Chas, painter	Right side from Junction at	35 Bond Wm Arth, cont (p. r)
33 Mills Mrs Hannah	2 Ashwell Jas, grocer	37 Newport Alex, blacksmith
35 Lawrence How (Francis & Arth), tobacconist & p. r	27 Cook & Son (David T), engr	39 Duckery Jn Jas, wro whr
37 Lewis Isaac, fancy goods	..... here is Lambton rd.	31 Murray Frank
39 Lewis Isaac, fruiter	..... here is Parkhouse st.	33 Patrick Jas, accountant
..... here is Philip st.....	Wilson Fredk Arth, constable	35 McIlhenny Jas, draper's ass
41 Scott & King, bookbndr	..... here is Lambton rd.	37 Duffell ..... music seller
43 King Jas W (Nid & K)	..... here is Parkhouse st.	37 Challinor Wm, photographer
47 The Wesley Edwld, motor	..... here is Parkhouse st.	Bryan Jas, Lancastr Park Hill
49 Fine Mrs	..... here is Parkhouse st.	..... here is Lambton rd.
49 Fine Mrs	..... here is Parkhouse st.	Bead Jno, cabinet maker
Crowthers Wm, slater	..... here is Parkhouse st.	Dixon Wm H Wood, coal dr
51 Scott Geo Eliza, hairbndr	..... here is Parkhouse st.	Dixon Mrs Wm Hy, W. ston
53 Valler Mrs Eliza	..... here is Parkhouse st.	C 4

Wise's Canterbury, Marlborough, Nelson and Westland Directory 1907-1908  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: Pg 49

years out. To add to the confusion, street names and numbers also changed. Street directories also list occupation, and finding out who the neighbours were can shed an interesting light on things. A full set on microfiche (1872-1954) can be seen at the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre.

LETTERS AND DIARIES, BUSINESS RECORDS. It is often worth checking at repositories whether any original documents belong to people who lived in the house have survived. Sometimes the actual building of the house is detailed in a diary, for example, and other information can be gleaned from these sources. Canterbury Museum and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre are good places to start. Archives New Zealand may have files about properties which previously belonged to government departments including railways houses.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE. Talking to neighbours, long standing residents of the area, and even getting in touch with the families of previous owners can be a fantastic source of information. Remember, however, that people's memories can be fallible.

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## Recommended reading

- Cochran, Christopher, 1980. *Restoring a New Zealand house*. New Zealand Historic Places Trust.
- Cooke, M B, 1972. *The age of houses illustrated*. Lincoln College, Farm Management and Rural Valuation Department.
- Morrison, J P, 1948. *The evolution of a city*. Christchurch City Council.
- Salmond, Jeremy, 1986. *Old New Zealand houses 1800-1940*. Reed Methven, Auckland.
- Wilson, John, 1989. *Christchurch, swamp to city: a short history of the Christchurch Drainage Board 1875-1989*. Christchurch Drainage Board, Lincoln.
- Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Volume III, 1903. The Cyclopaedia Co. Ltd.

Christchurch City Libraries, 2003. *Local history resources: an annotated bibliography of sources on the history of Christchurch, Lyttelton and Banks Peninsula*.



W H Harris collection  
Canterbury Historical Association collection  
Canterbury Museum  
Ref: 2000.199.1104

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## Addresses

Christchurch City Council  
Urban Design and Heritage Unit  
Environmental Services Unit  
163-173 Tuam Street  
PO Box 237  
Christchurch  
Telephone 941 8999  
Email [info@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:info@ccc.govt.nz)  
Website [www.ccc.govt.nz](http://www.ccc.govt.nz)

Aotearoa New Zealand Centre  
Central City Library  
Christchurch City Libraries  
Nga Kete Whanga-o-Otautahi  
Corner Gloucester Street and Oxford Terrace  
PO Box 4438  
Christchurch  
Telephone 941 7923  
Email [library@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:library@ccc.govt.nz)  
Website [library.christchurch.org.nz](http://library.christchurch.org.nz)

Archives New Zealand  
Te Whare Tohu Tuhituhinga o Aotearoa  
Christchurch Regional Office  
90 Peterborough Street  
PO Box 642  
Christchurch  
Telephone 377 0760  
Email [christchurch@archives.govt.nz](mailto:christchurch@archives.govt.nz)  
Website [www.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archives.govt.nz)

Macmillan Brown Library  
University of Canterbury  
University Drive Ilam  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch  
Telephone 366 7001  
Website [library.canterbury.ac.nz](http://library.canterbury.ac.nz)

Canterbury Museum  
Documentary Research Centre  
Rolleston Avenue  
Christchurch  
Telephone 366 5000  
Email [docinfo@canterburymuseum.com](mailto:docinfo@canterburymuseum.com)

Land Information New Zealand  
Toitu Te Whenua  
Torrens House, 195 Hereford Street  
Private Bag 4721  
Christchurch  
Telephone 0800 665 463  
Website [www.linz.govt.nz](http://www.linz.govt.nz)

New Zealand Historic Places Trust  
Pouhere Taonga  
Southern Regional Office  
Gough House  
90 Hereford Street  
PO Box 4403  
Christchurch  
Telephone 365 2897  
Website [www.historic.org.nz](http://www.historic.org.nz)

There is a great interest in researching the history of houses in the United Kingdom and a number of websites are devoted to this subject. One of the best is [www.house-detectives.co.uk](http://www.house-detectives.co.uk) The BBC also hosts a site with general advice on how to go about this sort of research at [www.bbc.co.uk/history/yourhistory/local/home](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/yourhistory/local/home)



Canterbury Museum  
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